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Giacosa
The Wager



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The Wager: a Poetic
Comedy in One Act:
by Giuseppe Giacosa:
Translated by Barrett H.
Clark

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BARRETT H. CLARK

GENERAL EDITOR

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GIUSEPPE GIACOSA.

Giacosa was one of the originators of modern Italian drama. His best plays—"As the Leaves," "Sad Loves," and "The Stronger"—take rank among the highest achievements of recent drama and are of especial importance in the author's own country.

"The Wager" (the original title is "A Game of Chess") was Giacosa's first play. It was produced in 1872. This little play requires a setting made to represent a castle-room furnished in the late Middle Ages' style. A few large tapestries—or rich portieres—two or three heavy chairs, hung with draperies, will serve to create the correct atmosphere. The costumes must be of the period.

THE WAGER.

PERSONS REPRESENTED.

RENÉ *Yolande's father*
YOLANDE
OLIVIER. *Count of Fombrone*
FERNAND. *Olivier's page*
A FOOTMAN.

The action takes place at René's castle, in the valley of Aosta, during the Fourteenth Century.

THE WAGER.

SCENE:—*A medium-sized room, the walls of which are hung with rich tapestries. The ceiling is heavily wainscotted. At the back there is a large chimney-piece bearing the family escutcheon. Here and there are wooden stools, carved benches and throne-like chairs, on the backs of which appear coats of arms with the family device. Opposite the fire-place is a large window, with heavy leaded glass. The curtains at the entrances are heavy with gold ornament. Near the fire-place, in the upper angle of the room, are two doors, one of which leads to a suite of chambers, the other to the grand stairway. There is also a small table with a chess-board and chess-men upon it.*

As the curtain rises, RENE and YOLANDE stand close together. Out-of-doors, the day is dark and cold, although the red of the cheering fire within does much to compensate for the weather. During the next few minutes, servants bring two or three Tuscan oil lamps and place them on the tables and mantel over the chimney.

YOLANDE. The endless cold and chilling rain!

RENE. Aye, and snow to-morrow, unless the mists 'round La Becca presage nought!

YOLANDE. And the never-ending wind!

RENE. What hour is it, child?

YOLANDE. 'Tis past four, father.

RENE. Yes, night is closing in.—Oh, how I pity thee, child! Thou prisoner, guarded by one whose hair is blanched with age, secluded in this dark and barren valley, cradle of tempests! See the gray mists, and hear the wind, and the cracking of the falling pines—!

YOLANDE. 'Tis the woodmen will be content this night—out 'mid mountain peaks, in the blinding snow——

RENE. Cease, cease, the very thought doth make me shake!

YOLANDE. Come, Father dear, come to the friendly fire, and tell me, mighty warrior, of thy youthful deeds of bravery.—Or tell me the tale of Harold—we all shall listen to thee: Christophe and Martin, and I——

RENE. (*seated on a bench beside the fire-place, as he gazes upon the burning logs*) Nay, thou alone, my child, none else! Sit near me, then, that my words may go arrow-like to thy heart,—Oh, Yolande, my consolation, my all! 'Tis thou who makest me to forget my wrinkles and be oblivious of my thin and silver hair. I am old, Yolande, and without thee I were a poor lone man in all the world.—Give heed, then, to my words: my ten tall castles shalt thou have, with all my earthly goods—and with thy proud and ancient name—thou shalt hold sway here in my place, and, like a queen——

YOLANDE. My Father, I divine, I guess the import of thy words! Wouldst thou that I speak thy inmost thoughts and intimate communions? For thy dear and cherished daughter thou wouldst have—a husband!

RENE. A noble, valiant warrior, who shall be thy pride, and mine. My child, I am near death, I feel, and——

YOLANDE. Nay, nay, not yet! Thou shalt grow young again——

RENE. The rooms in this old castle are barren

and full of solitude. Glad children's voices should awake the sleeping echoes in the long and gloomy corridors. I would have children to trouble my slumbers; to bring me to my youth again; I would have them—were it only to scold them.

YOLANDE. Nay, Father, I would live alone with thee, to love thee——

RENE. Yolande, mistake not. In this dark and fearful valley there is need of joy; and youth and happiness are joy. Fill my old castles with thy brimming youth.

YOLANDE. (*smiling*) I would be Abbess in a convent.

RENE. Jest not, my child!

YOLANDE. Then shall I be serious, in faith. I will confess to thee: at times when I'm alone with God and meditation, I feel me glow with something radiantly divine. I see a mighty and a high-born gentleman, crossing the castle moat; I listen holding in my breath to hear his words, which are warmer than the kiss of summer's sun. I look into his eyes, which dart forth flames—and then forsooth I wake, and call upon the vision—call in vain—None such come here——

RENE. How now? There is the Marquis d'Adrate?

YOLANDE. Ne'er have I set eyes on him.

RENE. The Duke of Rosalba——

YOLANDE. Ah, the Duke! And doth he lay the flattering unction to his soul—?

RENE. Beauty is not so precious a gift as a noble spirit.

YOLANDE. I see not the spirit: only the lack of beauty. None, save those alone who are perfect, can see in the face man's inmost soul.

RENE. Wouldst thou then have as sole companions the needle, the spindle, and the chess-board?

YOLANDE. Ah, the chess-board! Thou temptest me to give up all, and throw defiance in thy face.

RENE. Give me but leave to finish—Nay, I should but fail—But, tell me——

YOLANDE. One day thou toldest me—I have not forgotten it—that when the time was ripe I should be free to give myself to whom I listed.

RENE. True, I leave thee mistress of thyself. Though there be those that mock, I call God as witness that I do my best. I do believe thy choice will do thee credit and increase with honor the rich and noble heritage that is thy name. Tell me, is thine a secret love?

YOLANDE. Nay.

RENE. I know thee, child—as true as steel—thou wouldst not willingly deceive my age.

YOLANDE. Father, I will bow down unto thy wishes: choose me out a husband. I will accept in dumb obedience what Fate and thou decree.

RENE. My child!

YOLANDE. Hark! The bell in the tower soundeth!

RENE. Some vassal, I doubt not, come to offer tribute.

YOLANDE. (*at the casement*) I see many mounted horsemen!

(A SERVANT enters.)

SERVANT. The Count of Fombrone asks to be received by my noble master.

RENE. Fombrone! Make haste and bid him welcome! No guest shall he be: rather host and master!

(*The SERVANT goes out; a moment later, enter OLIVIER Count of Fombrone, followed by his page FERNAND.*)

RENE. (*to FOMBRONE*) My old and honored friend, Olivier! I bid thee welcome! This is in faith a day of gladness for us!

OLIVIER. Friendship warms the heart.— By Heaven, I never till this instant felt its fulness!

RENE. (*taking YOLANDE by the hand and presenting her to OLIVIER*) Yolande, my daughter!

OLIVIER. (*bowing*) One of God's miracles, my friend: the white snow and the red rose dwelling together in such proximity!

RENE. (*to YOLANDE*) Thou knowest his name: he was my brother-in-arms in the days gone by, when we were in the pristine vigor of youth. Ofttimes have we fought side by side, and won victories—as Montserrat knows, to her sorrow!

OLIVIER. (*indicating FERNAND*) Here is Fernand, my page!

RENE. (*after intently scanning the page with a pleasant air of good-humor, and bowing slightly to the ceremonious salutation of the youth; to FOMBRONE*) He is of thy stamp; I doubt not good blood flows in his veins; that he is quick with the sword, prompt to return a blow.— Servants, pour out the Montmeillant!

(SERVANTS *pour wine.*)

OLIVIER. (*seating himself by the fire*) By Heaven, thy daughter is fair! And thy château strong!

RENE. Well may it be! In these rough times! There be rumors abroad of bandits—and deeds of black violence. Hast thou, my friend, not met with some adventure—some mishap?

OLIVIER. At the foot of the mountain, near to the ravine, we were set upon, and were it not for the gallant bravery of yonder page—! We were close upon the ravine, in the wood.— Close by my side, I heard a sharp, short whistle, then saw ten ruffians, full-armed, hid in a thick and thorny ambush. One of them, their chief, came forth and insolently bade me follow him! Then spoke up

Fernand: "We'll follow thee, mayhap, but where?"— And thereupon he struck the fellow dead. Upon the instant all the robber band engaged in combat. Nine ruffians, bravadoes, desperately bloody! Then Fernand, feigning speech with me, turned round, then flew, digging deep the spurs into his charger. Five bandits thereupon gave chase——

RENE. The page, did he elude the five?

OLIVIER. Not many moments after, smiling he cantered back and, single-handed, like some antique centaur, he set upon the rest with fiendish haste. They parried thrust on thrust—surrounded him—his sword soon broke into a hundred pieces, so fiercely laid he on— We left them then, for two had fled and three lay speechless on the ground, never to rise again.

RENE. And thou, wast thou not wounded?

OLIVIER. Not I, but he, the lad, received a bloody wound—'tis better now— (to FERNAND) Say, page, is't not quite cured?

FERNAND. Aye, quite, my lord.

RENE. Give me thy hand; thou hast proved thyself a valiant lad and wise. Thy father will surely kiss thee for thy deed!

FERNAND. Alas, I have no father!

RENE. And thy mother—?

FERNAND. That comfort also do I lack, my lord.

RENE. What is thy name?

FERNAND. Fernand——

RENE. Thou shouldst have princes' blood in thy veins, lad!

FERNAND. With God's help, I shall make glorious my house and name!

RENE. Thou art proud!

FERNAND. Pride, my lord, is my sole heritage. All that I possess I owe to mine own right arm.

RENE. The strength and courage of youth are in thee—yet give ear to the sage and well-weighted

counsel of an old and tested warrior: one's glory grows by boasting little of it.

FERNAND. 'Tis my belief that youth should vaunt itself: my words are matched but by my deeds!— I honor thee, my lord, for all thy mighty valor and thy deeds, and for the love that thou dost bear my master; but boldly do I tell thee; I bear high my head, and cry aloud my deeds where'er I list!

RENE. Oh, youth with rosy cheeks and all-too-ready lips, what knowest thou of life? Thy confidence, thy bravery, thy deeds of prowess—'tis fortune favors thee. Thou knowest not that night comes soon to blot black brightest hopes, that what by day seems bright, by night shows but chimerical and false. In early years, I thirsted after peril and sought out death in the imminent deadly breach; I sought out fleeting phantoms of vain glory, and panted for illustrious renown.— But one dark day, my strength began to fail, my sword weighed heavy—my dreams of glory all dispersed, like mists before the sun: gone were the visions of yesteryear—

FERNAND. Who ever equalled thee, my lord, in valiancy? One day I shall with pride relate, "I saw him and had speech with him!" Thy words I treasure in the secret chambers of my heart, and thy good counsel follow.— But, and prithee let me tell thee: my life and fortune have been different from thine own: thou hast thy noble name—thy father gave it thee—it spurred thee on to mighty deeds. I grew from childhood without others' help—without a name: an orphan—and, at a time when others laugh and love, tears were my lot! No pity! None taught to me the love of God, none taught His laws: my faith, my honor, and my good right arm—these are *my* God! Though now a simple page, it is my dream to be in turn esquire—spurréd knight.—Still wouldst thou that I check

my words? I am strong, I feel my sword a light wand in my hand, without a peer in all the world! He who throws his challenge in my face, will bite the earth;—my arrow never swerves a single jot, my sling casts straight and bringeth down its prey; and well versed am I in all the arts: I play the lute, write roundels, ballads which do please full well; fair châtelaines and damsels oft have——

RENE. Hold, youth! Thy tongue outstrips thee! Have a care! Mayhap thy prowess will be put to test—and if thou fail——!

FERNAND. My lord, I pray thee make the test: I take thy challenge, and will victor be. I can defend myself in all: in battle, in a game of chess——

RENE. I'll take thy challenge, master of all the arts! (*to YOLANDE*) My child, pray teach this braggart how to play at chess! (*to FERNAND*) Now show thy skill—thou'lt lose, I warn thee!

FERNAND. Time will show, my lord!— For what then shall we play?

RENE. If thou art victor in this game, Yolande shall be thy prize—her hand be thy reward!

FERNAND. And if I lose?

RENE. Thy head, rash page, is mine!

FERNAND. I can but take thy gracious offer!

RENE. Reflect! Consider! If thou fail——

FERNAND. I fail, so be it! I know full well how *men* can die.

RENE. Come, daughter.

(*YOLANDE and FERNAND seat themselves and make preparations for the game, at the small table.*)

FERNAND. (*to RENE*) Forgive me for my boldness, my lord, but prithee join the Count, yonder by the hearth: nought must distract me from my game.

(*RENE and OLIVIER stand apart from FERNAND and YOLANDE.*)

OLIVIER. 'Tis well!

RENE. I willingly obey——

OLIVIER. But why thy bloody alternative——?

RENE. Bloody?

OLIVIER. Now that I think on't, 'tis scarce unjust. Many a time and oft have I complained and scolded—and yet his faith is so supremely firm! The braggart's eye is sharp and sure; his spirit's noble.— Ah, his youth recalls so vividly mine own.

RENE. And yet I——

OLIVIER. Thou sayest——?

RENE. Nought.

OLIVIER. Thy face speaks louder far than words!

RENE. I would that he would win!

OLIVIER. And wed thy daughter?

RENE. Aye, there's the rub!

OLIVIER. Thou seest now how skilfully thy child must play! How if *he* lose, then?

RENE. (*hesitating*) I know not.

OLIVIER. No forfeit?

RENE. (*musings*) None! Yet owe I nothing to this madcap youth!— My pact holds not!

OLIVIER. How now? Thou sayest—? Wouldst thou not keep thy promised word?

RENE. And if he gave me back that selfsame word?

(RENE and OLIVIER converse in an undertone.)

YOLANDE. What aileth thee, page Fernand? Thou playest not——

FERNAND. I look into thine eyes so fair, that speak to me.

YOLANDE. Meantime I take thy Knight and Bishop! And here, a Castle!— Thy Pawn there goes without a single word from thee—unless thou save him! Take care! a false step, page, will lose thee!

FERNAND. I thank thee, sweet Yolande.— I hold my peace thinking of things far-off; so sadly-

sure am I of losing, that I no longer think: a lethargy hath seized upon my limbs!

YOLANDE. Wouldst thou that we change places, Fernand?

FERNAND. Nay: for I would be in danger's way. stay where thou art.

YOLANDE. 'Tis thine to move, then.— Methinks that something in thy life doth trouble thee?— Ah, maladroït! A rash, unthinking move was that! I leave my Rook a prey in capturing thy Pawn!

FERNAND. I scarcely dare to take it—'tis a gift.

YOLANDE. Thou makest me forget the game, fair page! Thou thinkest, dost thou not?— I purposely played false?

RENE. (*approaching the players*) What's this?

FERNAND. Thou seest before thee but a loser!

RENE. Enough, my son! Cease, cease this game! We both were mad to enter such a pact!

FERNAND. Nay, a promise made is a promise kept!

RENE. Thou'lt lose! Thou hast confessed it.

FERNAND. Yet I refuse all favor or excuse: for were I victor then should I demand my prize.

RENE. Take heed, Fernand, and tempt not Providence!

FERNAND. My word is given; I repent not, but do wait my destiny.

RENE. So be't then: I am content. (*he leaves, but returns a moment later*) Wait! Thou are not yet grown up to man's estate; thou'rt still impetuous with the hot blood of youth. Take counsel, curb thy headlong pride; I beg thee as a father would his son.— Yolande, add thy entreaties to mine own, and bid him cease!

YOLANDE. Father, page Fernand hath not lost the game; he may perchance be victor yet.

RENE. Dost thou not know that if he lose——?

FERNAND. (*interrupting*) Cease, Count! No more! My honor and thine own are at stake!

RENE. Thou wishest—? I leave thee then in Fortune's hands.

(RENE returns to OLIVIER and continues conversing with him.— YOLANDE and FERNAND play in silence for a short time.)

YOLANDE. What meant my Father by "if he lose——?"

FERNAND. Nought, he——

YOLANDE. And yet his words were charged with dark and veiled meaning—and thou didst interrupt.— Tell me: what lose thou if in this game thou meet'st defeat?

FERNAND. Nought that my heart holds dear.

YOLANDE. My father wishes for thy victory. Some evil doth forbode, and trouble thee!

FERNAND. I lose, sweet Yolande.

YOLANDE. Unhappy portent!

FERNAND. Thy eyes that speak to me——!

YOLANDE. Thou art strangely sad.— Thy wound, page, is quite healed?

FERNAND. My wound is nought.— How sweet is life!

YOLANDE. Thy land is far away, page Fernand?

FERNAND. The land where I was born is sweet: the air is soft, and songs float on the summer breezes. Pale olive trees cast their mirrored images upon the bosom of the sea—the hills are sown with palms and orange trees: fair Nature smiles.— 'Tis Paradise beyond what can be dreamed.

YOLANDE. There must be maidens fair in thy sweet land——?

FERNAND. Fancy-free in love, facile and inconstant.— Fair are our women, aye, but fairer still our land—but, my Yolande, my fair Yolande!

YOLANDE. (*recoiling a little*) Thy voice is sweet!

FERNAND. Hearken to my words, then: Yolande,

hast thou not in dreams perchance feared death before thou hadst known love? Hast thou not yearned for thy share of the Sun? Hast thou ne'er given words to thy fleeting thoughts? Thy secret, inmost, maiden's thoughts——?

YOLANDE. Nay——

FERNAND. Nay? Then come, one hour of sweet forgetfulness, I'll lose mine eyes in thine! Let Destiny then come, and welcome!

YOLANDE. Oh, Fernand!

FERNAND. Thy liquid hair!

YOLANDE. Thou speak'st of death—what meaning——?

FERNAND. Thy smile is sweet!

YOLANDE. Thine, page, is sad!

FERNAND. I did aspire too high: my wingéd hopes did beat against the gates of Heaven! Come, to play! My golden dream——

YOLANDE. Why sighest thou?

FERNAND. For my native land—and my heart's peace!

YOLANDE. And some fair smiling châtelaine——?

FERNAND. Take heed, thou'lt lose!

YOLANDE. Thou fearest then thy victory?

FERNAND. Thou dost not know that if I lose, my life is forfeit? But dost thou also know that thou are sweet beyond compare, and that—I love thee? Thy milk-white skin, thy golden hair!—Yolande, if thou dost love me not, I am alone upon the earth!

YOLANDE. Blind page, who cannot see, this long time past I sought thy eyes;—I would that that great sweetness thou didst speak of should be mine!

OLIVIER. (*to RENE*) Thou'rt pensive now?

RENE. (*to FERNAND*) The game, proud page?

FERNAND. (*smiling*) Another Pawn is lost!

YOLANDE. Fernand, thy words have first awaked in me as nought else the meaning of that which I have often heard. How many times in dreams and

visions have I figured thee! How oft have I murmured vague desires and far-off hopes! One ray of sun in the eternal black of night! Counts and Marquis and gallant knights have wooed me—but within me was an instinct bade me wait. And now my Fernand comes to break the night, illumining my soul!

FERNAND. Yolande, then thou art mine? Thy hand! A page's state seems not to low for thee?

YOLANDE. Nay, thou are *thou*, my Fernand!—Quick! Two plays and thou art victor!

RENE. (*approaching them again*) How now?

YOLANDE. Thy once unconquered daughter now doth face defeat!

RENE. Thou hast lost?

YOLANDE. Not yet—but the page will win.

RENE. Cease, Fernand, cease this mad game! Hear thou my offer: choose 'mongst my castles, take thou the strongest, fairest of them all, 'tis thine—! I'll make thee rich and noble! Give me back my word!

FERNAND. My lord, this be my answer: I love thy daughter: keep thou thy word!

RENE. My word is given, and if thou still persist, I keep it. But if thou hast a soul of honor, and dost love my child, think but of a father's loneliness, and pardon me; consider but her noble blood—a duke hath she refused, and princes press me for her hand.

(FERNAND *hesitates*; YOLANDE *sees him, and makes a sign to continue the game.*)

YOLANDE. (*aside to FERNAND*) Come Fernand, play!

RENE. Mayhap some day thou shalt be rich and noble, but now how canst thou hope to make her happy?

YOLANDE. (*aside to FERNAND*) One play, and I am lost! Courage, good Fernand!

RENE. I tell thee, Yolande cannot content herself with thee, page——

(While FERNAND hesitates, YOLANDE pettishly takes his hand and plays for him.)

YOLANDE. Come, the game's over; thy honor is at stake, my Father!

RENE. Thou sayest——?

YOLANDE. (*rising*) I lose! (*The others rise*)

OLIVIER. Or love or devil played on Fernand's side!

YOLANDE. (*to RENE*) Thy obedient daughter, Father! Thou didst desire a husband for her! Thy honor and my wishes choose the same!

RENE. But art thou not ashamed of thy defeat?

YOLANDE. 'Tis scarce defeat, my Father; he who is victor is thy son-in-law.— The sting is less!

RENE. (*to FERNAND, after a short pause*) So be it, then!— Though Providence forgot to endow thee with an old and noble name, thou must content thyself with mine——

FERNAND. Oh, my lord——

RENE. Be gallant, wise, and gain renown.— I render thanks to Heaven for thee, my boy—my son!

(FERNAND kneels at RENE's feet; RENE places his hands on the page's head, while he in turn looks in silence upon YOLANDE.)

YOLANDE. Once more thou dost regard me, page, in silence!

FERNAND. I look into thine eyes so fair, that speak to me!

CURTAIN.

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BARRETT H. CLARK

General Editor



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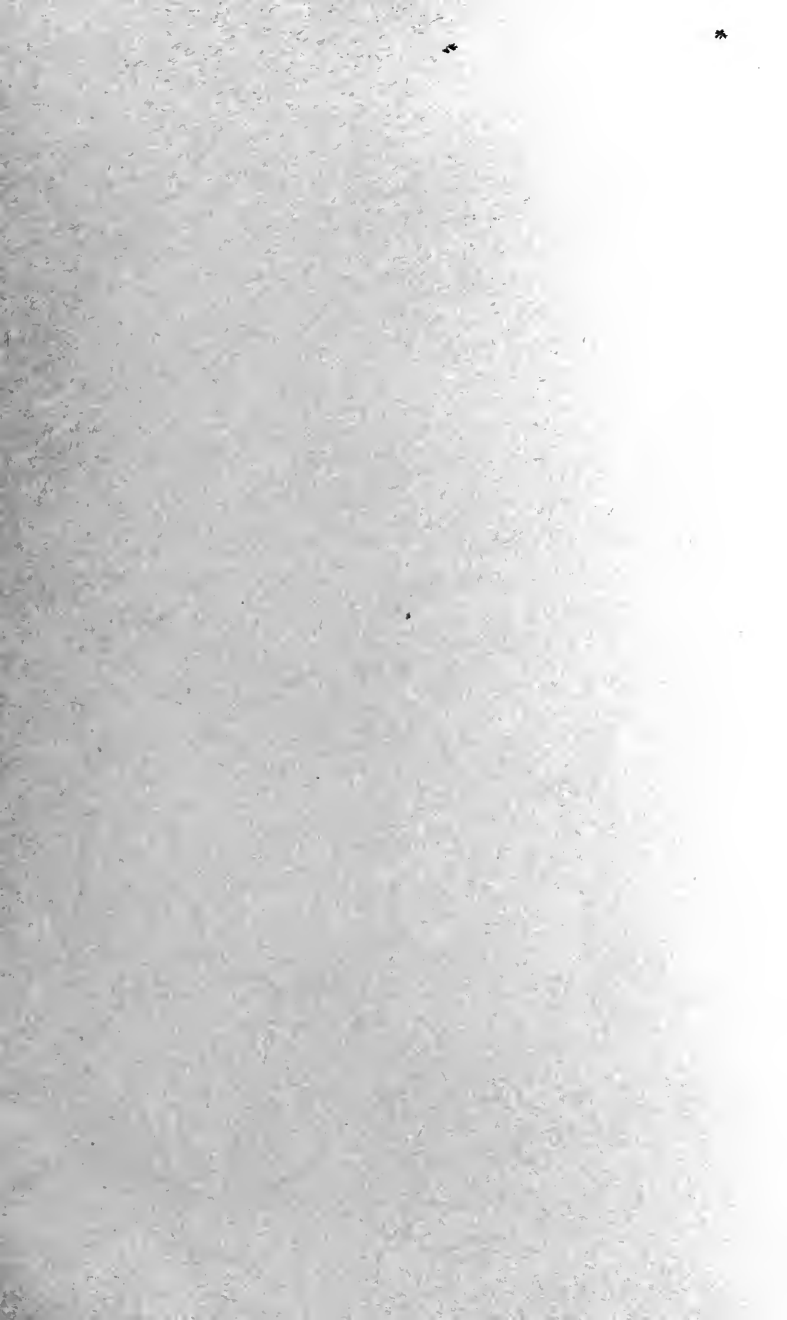
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